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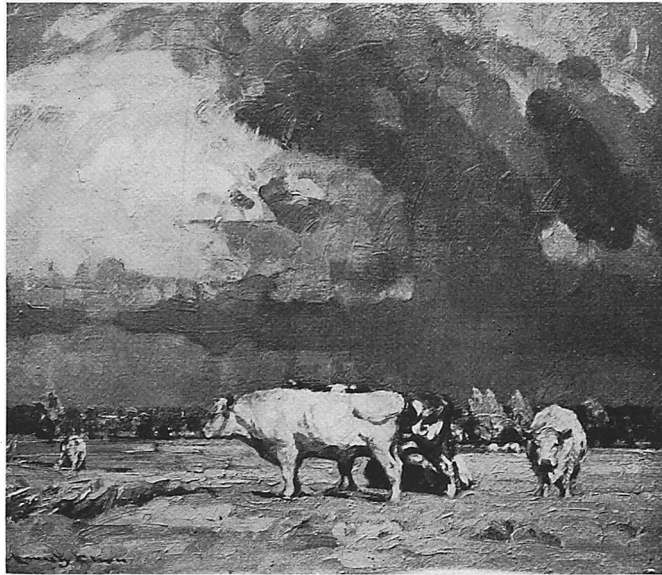
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STUDY FOR "WIDE MARSHES" (Royal Academy 1915)
By ARNESBY BROWN R. A.
—In the possession of the Carroll Gallery

Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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I WONDER how many of the thousands who made up that festive throng remembered on the fourth of March last that it was the anniversary of the Chelsea Arts Ball of 1914, a function and a gathering which from small and local beginnings had come to be an event not merely of metropolitan but international interest, inasmuch that the guests included many who had journeyed from Paris, Antwerp, Brussels, etc., to be present. Verbal descriptions of such scenes are powerless to convey any impression of actuality and are in the main as dull and tedious as what they attempt to portray is gay and brilliant; but it will serve just to state that the vast auditorium and the encircling tiers of boxes and galleries towering one above the other to the lofty roof showed resplendent with

the costumes of some five thousand dancers and onlookers, arrayed in every imaginable type and fashion—an epitome and a parade of man's—and woman's—efforts to outvie the lilies of the field from the days of Pharaoh and of Solomon down to the dernier cri—weird and wonderful—of the Cubists and the Futurists.

Trite and obvious though the reflection is, yet none the less it grips the heart to think how many of that brave company have danced their last measure, and still and stark lie strewn beneath the trodden and trenched plains of Flanders and of France. Who could have guessed the grim shadow was so near? The Chelsea Arts Dance was the first and remained the most popular of these semi-Bohemian, semi-fashionable balls and masques, which orig-



*"THE COUNCIL MEETING" A TWO HOURS "LANGHAM" SKETCH
By W. D. ALMOND*

inating in the inner Art circles of London, quickly became functions to which flocked all the estates of the realm, royalty leading the way. This, the first of them, grew from the veriest mustard seed; the Chelsea Arts Club—it numbers Whistler and Sargent among its members past and present—a few years ago found itself confronted with the necessity of some repairs to its modest home, but also with a much too modest bank balance; “let us give a dance”—“fancy dress”—the local town hall was hired, the studios were ransacked for costumes and properties, the night came and such a success was the result that the following years still larger halls were successively taken, finally culminating in that ne plus ultra, the Albert Hall. Substantial sums were distributed to the various art charities from the profits, and the dance seemed like to become a regular society fixture, when without warning it and a thousand other harmless beneficent frivolities found themselves forgotten by a world at

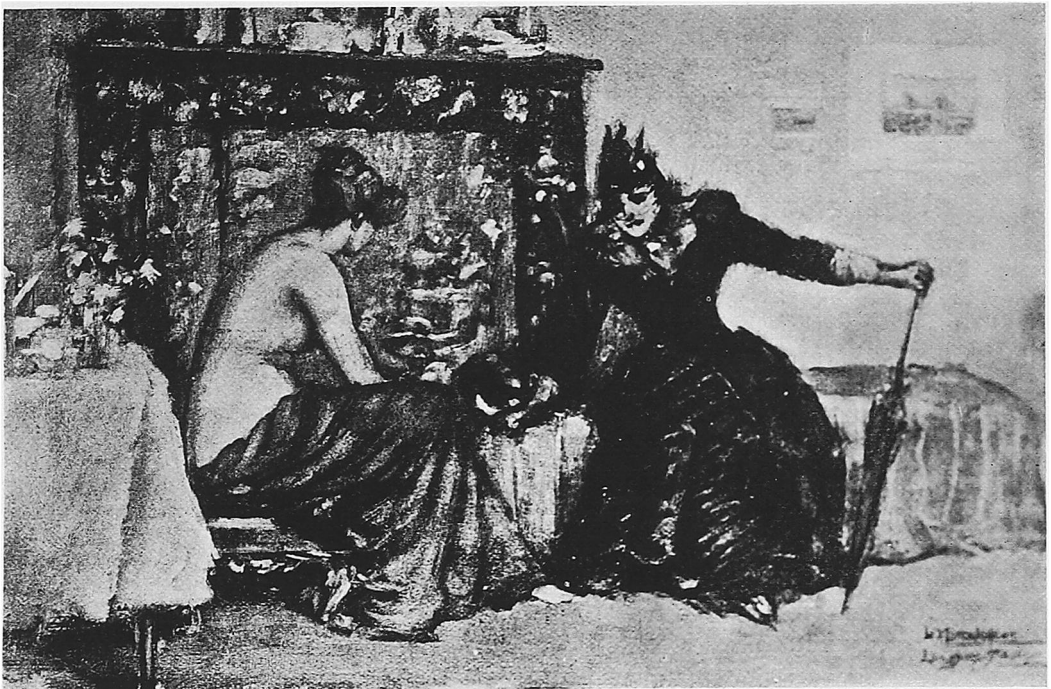
grips with the horrors of war.

Particularly in the art world have the various social gatherings, functions, etc., felt the pressure of events. “Show Sunday” was hardly the shadow of itself this year. The portrait painters were practically the only artists who opened their studios to visitors, and even here one felt the presence of the war, for much of the work shown consisted of portraits of men who had gone to the front, or were about to do so, and unbidden but not to be denied there came to the mind the reflection that behind, in the shadow of the background, as it were, there lurked a great dread, already making provision for a possible future, wherein all may be gone but memories, and this painted likeness. Outwardly to eye and ear the scene was one of pretty frocks, fair faces and forms, the rattle of teacups, the ripple of laughter and voices in friendly greeting and converse, but at the heart of this bright seeming lay crouching the menace of the time. How different was this

"Picture Sunday" in the far-off days of peace, which we took so lightly for granted and valued as little as the air we breathe. At the height of its vogue it gave quite a character of bustle and something afoot to those quarters of London where the brethren of the brush and chisel mostly have their studios. It began in a very modest way in the middle Victoria decades, and indeed is quite a British institution. "Show Sunday" is the Sunday immediately before the final day for sending in works of art to the "Royal Academy" for its annual summer exhibition, consequently it is always the last Sunday in March or the first Sunday in April, accordingly as the first Monday in May happens to fall later or earlier for the opening of the exhibition. It was naturally spent by the painters and sculptors in visiting each other's studios, for a final review and criticism of the work. An occasional lay friend, patron or dealer also might drop in to have a look at what generally consisted of the principal

efforts of the year. These gatherings, as may be imagined, were very informal and very pleasant, so pleasant indeed that in time they began to be invaded by the "eternal feminine" and whisky and pipes and painting coats gradually and reluctantly gave place to tea and cakes, and Sunday frocks—and this ever more and more.

Presently it dawned upon society that here to hand was a new field wherein to display its airs and graces, an opportunity to pose itself and be seen against a new background. A studio flooded with light from its great windows and yet mysterious with its dim alcoves and recesses, haunted perchance by a grim skeleton or by some weird lay figure grotesquely awry, here a suit of armor, there a plaster Venus, its jumble of costumes of every period and date, cabinets, tapestries and mirrors, the dusky glint of old brasses, pewter and china, painting table littered with an artist's impedimenta and sheafs of brushes, paints, bottles of oil and varnish, palettes,



"IN BOHEMIA" A TWO HOURS "LANGHAM" SKETCH
By W. A. BREAKSPEARE

easels of every sort and size, and last of all the pictures—this was another world with another air, another tone all refreshingly novel and unlike the gilded salons of Mayfair. There was an old-time sentiment amidst these relics, and flotsam and jetsam from the past, a touch of romance about the life spent amongst them, which stirred and pleased the jaded sensibilities of the throng from vanity fair.

Soon it came to be understood that it gave a cachet during the ensuing season to be able to remark casually—at dinner or dance, of any pictures of the year—"Ah, yes, I saw it at the studio before it went into the exhibition" and Country Mouse, who has only seen it with the rest of the shilling crowd at the Royal Academy, is consequently greatly impressed; her cousin, "Town Mouse," is evidently living in the very heart of things. The fashion grew and grew; the Sunday papers gave lists of the studios that were on view, and a summary of the pictures to be seen. Accordingly on this day for once the fashionable world got up betimes, and from long before noon Hampstead, St. John's Wood, Chelsea and Kensington lacked their usual Sabbath repose in a rattle of cabs and carriages careering about from one studio to another; in fact, in some of the streets affected by the very fashionable painters the procession of vehicles rivaled that of a royal levee. It was all very interesting and amusing. Society met itself and disported itself in this new environment; it rubbed shoulders with the last new beauty from the stage, and viewed with interested curiosity the artist's models, who were perhaps dispensing tea, and if there was a faint soupcon of scandal that in no way lessened the piquancy of the situation, or the interest. Moreover, the fashion created quite a little boom in certain trades. The confectioners prepared heavily for "Show Sunday," the stationer stocked "Show Sunday" cards as a regular line, and numbers of people got an extra day's work as door

keepers, cloak room attendants, etc., and things went merrily full steam ahead for more than a generation. Then came something of an ebb; the artists began to ask themselves if it was not becoming a little too much of a good thing—somewhat too big and a little vulgarized; besides whilst he was keeping open house for the world and his wife, he and his work seemed in danger of being overlooked in the fashionable melee, who indeed in the end took to chartering a conveyance and telling the coachman to drive round to all the studios *he* knew of. Presently indeed, Cook's or Dr. Lunn might be organizing "Show Sunday touring parties" and so the leading painters and sculptors began to shut off steam, invitation lists were cut down, and the passer-by was no longer at liberty to enter any studio whereof the door was open. But all this still left the day a very pleasant and important one in the artistic calendar.

Another and far older social function of artistic Bohemia which the war has suspended were the three social gatherings held during the winter, familiarly known not merely in London but in the art circles of Paris, Munich, Antwerp and Dusseldorf, as the "Langham Smokers." This unique club, of which the original and full title is "The Artists' Society for Study from the Life," is fast approaching its centenary, and is well worthy a fuller notice than the passing one which I can give it at present. It has been indeed the subject of quite a literature scattered through the various magazines of the last twenty-five years, including a very good one in "Harper's" some years ago. At its old world rooms under the shadow of the Langham Hotel on every night in the year, Sundays and Christmas Day alone excepted, a model is posed, on the Fridays a memory sketch or design is made, within a time limit of two hours. Many pictures of world-wide popularity and note have had their origin in these two hours sketches. One or two typ-

ical specimens of these sketches are reproduced herewith. A list of the past and present members of the club is in a measure a roll call of English art. The "smokers," which for the first time in its career the club has suspended owing to the absence of so many of the younger members at the front, and to the absorption of all other interests into that of the war, were held on three nights in November, February and May, when the studies and sketches are exhibited on the walls to friends and guests invited by the members. Later in the evening an entertainment, musical, dramatic, etc., would be given by members of the "Savage," "The Yorick," the "Eccentric," and other kindred societies of London Bohemia and were generally of the very highest order of excellence, whilst in one of the rooms a fixed traditional fare of bread and cheese and celery, or lettuce and watercress according to season is dispensed unstintedly by two of the comeliest of the models to all comers, with beer and whisky to help deglutition. Millionaires might be seen enjoying this modest fare with a gusto, inspired, I suppose, by the environment and spirit of the occasion, which often I dare say they do not feel for the sumptuous and costly menus of their own loaded tables. The smoke-laden atmosphere of the crowded rooms as the evening wears on is popularly believed to rival the consistency of high grade London fogs. The society is historic and unique in art, and I hope later to give further details of its origin and history, and the work done in its quaint old rooms.

Already some of the more important ex-



"LOWLANDS" A TWO HOURS "LANGHAM" SKETCH
By GEORGE HAETE R. I.

hibitions have opened their doors to the public, like the "Royal Institute of Water Colors." Astonishing to say, sales up to date have proved quite equal to the average, and this, too, following on the success of the special war exhibition held at the Academy this winter.

I regret very much to hear that Robert Meyerheim, R. I., whose charming work I drew attention to in my last letter, is, at the present moment, lying dangerously ill at his country residence. It has been said of his pictures that they are the very embodiment of "the soul of the countryside," and certain it is they afford a peculiar sense of solace, particularly in these chastening times. It is earnestly to be hoped that he may long be spared to paint them!

Among recent elections to the full membership of the Royal Academy is that of Mr. Arnesby Brown, who as a cattle painter easily holds the first place in modern art. The study for his principal picture in this year's Academy is reproduced herein. Later I propose to deal more fully with his work.